

properties of a structure from knowledge of other properties.

Per Hage
University of Utah

Frank Harary
University of Michigan

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See also: *networks*.

Greenberg, Joseph H. (1915–)

Joseph H. Greenberg, distinguished American linguist and anthropologist, was born in Brooklyn, New York, on 28 May 1915. He took his bachelor's degree at Columbia University in 1936 and his Ph.D. (anthropology) at Northwestern University in 1940. He taught at the University of Minnesota from 1946 to 1948 and Columbia University from 1948 to 1962; since 1962 he has been professor of anthropology and linguistics at Stanford University.

Greenberg is a versatile scholar who has made major contributions in the areas of kinship, traditional religion, poetics, culture history, language contact, and linguistic reconstruction. His most important, best-known work has been concerned with language classification and language universals.

(1) *Language Classification*: Greenberg's major work in this area (Greenberg, 1963a) is his comprehensive classification of the languages of Africa. As presented in revised form in 1963, the classification assigned all of the thousand or so languages of Africa to four large stocks: Niger-Kordofanian, Nilo-Saharan, Afroasiatic (formerly 'Hamito-Semitic') and Khoisan. Significant departures from earlier classifications of African languages included the following: (a) The Bantu languages were treated as a closely knit family related to the languages of West Africa rather than as an independent stock. (b) The 'Hamitic' family was rejected *in toto* as a racially inspired concept having no linguistic reality. Languages previously classified as 'Hamitic', such as Fulani, Maasai, Hausa and Nama (Hottentot) were assigned as appropriate to the four established stocks. (c) The sub-Saharan Chadic languages were placed within the Afroasiatic stock alongside languages of North Africa and the Near East such as Berber,

Ancient Egyptian, Hebrew and Somali.

Greenberg has also provided substantive classifications of Oceanic and American Indian languages. In addition, he has done important work on the theory and methodology of language classification, typological as well as historical/genetic (Greenberg, 1957).

(2) *Language Universals*: Greenberg's innovative approach to language universals, dating from the early 1960s (Greenberg, 1963b; 1966; 1978), represented a revolutionary break from the then dominant ethos in American linguistics and anthropology, namely the extreme relativistic, particularistic view that the structure of each language was unique and potentially completely different from that of every other language. Greenberg demonstrated that from the comparative study of large numbers of languages, one could draw significant empirical generalizations about languages as a whole, the so-called 'language universals'. For example, given the three categories Subject (S), Verb (V) and Object (O), six word orders are logically possible, whereas in fact only three (SOV, SVO, VSO) commonly occur (and these in very unequal numbers) while the others are exceedingly rare. Greenberg further developed the concept of implicational universals, that is, generalizations of the form, 'If a language has X, then Y holds,' there being no universal requirement that a language must have X. For example, if a language has nasalized vowels (and many do not) it holds universally that the number of such vowels will not exceed the number of non-nasal vowels in the same language.

A live question spawned by Greenberg's work has been to explain why the universals exist. Greenberg himself has shown that some universals at least are a natural consequence of known processes of language change. Other scholars have continued to seek explanations in terms of formal grammar, pragmatics or psychology.

Paul Newman
Indiana University, Bloomington

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Further Reading

- Juillard, A. (ed.) (1976), *Linguistic Studies Offered to Joseph Greenberg on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, Saratoga, California.